Arthur Moeller van den Bruck:
The Man & His Thought

By Lucian Tudor

Arthur Moeller van den Bruck was one of the most important, perhaps even the single most important, figure of what is known as the "Conservative Revolution" in early 20th century Germany. His influence on conservative German thought, despite its limitations, is deep and lasting, carrying on even into the present day. Indeed there may be some truth to the mystical declaration made by his wife: "In trying to account for the question who was Moeller van den Bruck, you are really addressing a question to Germany's destiny."[1] An examination of his life and philosophical thought is an examination of one of those great forces in the realm of ideas that moves nations. And it is for the value to any nationalist or conservative inherent in such an examination that we aim to accomplish that here concisely.

Early Life and Development

Arthur Moeller van den Bruck was born on April 23, 1876 in Solingen in the Rhineland area of Germany. At the age of sixteen, Moeller van den Bruck (we will hereafter shorten his last name to Moeller) was expelled from the Gymnasium which he was attending at Dusseldorf due to the fact that he was indifferent in his classes, which was a result of his preoccupation with German literature and philosophy. This expulsion did not stop him from continuing his literary studies and he even attended lectures at several intellectual centers, despite not being able to enter a university.[2]

Friedrich Nietzsche's (and to some extent also Paul de Lagarde's and Julius Langbehn's) philosophy had a powerful influence on Moeller's thought in his youth, and shaped his views of Bismarck's Second Reich, a state which he found disagreeable because of its "forced patriotism." At this time, Moeller was extremely "un-political" and decided to leave Germany in 1902 for some time to avoid military service.[3] The first location to which he traveled was Paris, where he began the writing of an eight-volume work titled Die Deutschen: unsere Menschengeschichte ("The Germans: Our People's History"), published from the years 1904 to 1910, which was a cultural history that classified significant Germans according to characteristic psychological types.[4]

Supplementing Die Deutschen, Moeller published in 1905 Die Zeitgenossen ("The Contemporaries"), which presented his concept of "old peoples" and "young peoples," an idea which he would reassert in later notable works.[5] During this time he also acquired a fascination with Fyodor Dostoevsky's work and also an admiration for the "Eastern[Russian] spirit," which motivated him to produce a German translation of Dostoevsky's works with the help of Dmitry Merezhkovsky.[6]

From the years 1912 to 1914, Moeller had traveled throughout various nations, particularly through Italy, England, Russia, and Scandinavia, having originally planned to write books describing the prime characteristics of certain nations, but he ultimately only finished a book on Italian art titled Die Italienische Schönheit ("The Italian Beauty") in 1913.[7]

World War I, Young Peoples, and Racial Theory

When the First World War began, Moeller returned to Germany due to a feeling of attachment for Germany and enlisted in military service. In 1916, after having been discharged from the army due to suffering from nervous disorders, he produced a key work known as Der preussische Stil ("The Prussian Style"). This book, although its primary focus was on Prussian architecture, presented Moeller's view on the nature of the Prussian character, which he now praised, writing that "Prussianism is the will to the state, and the interpretation of historical life as political life in which we must act as political men."[8]

In 1919, Moeller produced another of his famous works known as Das Recht der Jungen Völker ("The Right of Young Peoples"), which reasserted his idea of "young peoples" and "old peoples" in a new form. In this theory, peoples or nations (Völker, which is the plural form of Volk) differed in "age," which means not age in years or actual time but rather in their character and behavior. "Young peoples," which included Germany, Russia, and America, possessed a high amount of vitality, hard work, will-to-power, strength, and energy. "Old peoples," which included Italy, England, and France, were saturated, highly developed, valued "happiness" over work, and generally had a lower amount of energy and vitality.[9]

According to Moeller, the destiny of peoples would be determined by the "law of rise and decline of nations," which held that "all aging states relentlessly sink down from their hegemonial positions."[10] However, "young peoples" could be defeated in war by a coalition of "old peoples," as Germany had been in World War I, although this would not crush a "young people" if the resulting conditions would still leave that nation with the ability to exist and grow. Consequently, Moeller advocated an alliance between Germany, America, and Russia, hoping that with this effort Wilson's "Fourteen Points" could be implemented and Germany would live under reasonable conditions. However, the resulting peace treaty was the Versailles Treaty and not the Fourteen Points.[11]

In Das Recht der Jungen Völker Moeller also included some earlier writing he had done on the subject of race. Moeller believed that humans could not be divided into races solely by anthropology because Man is "more than nature." He had a peculiar idea of race which presented a dichotomy between Rasse des Blutes ("Race of the Blood"), which refers to the common biological concept of race, and Rasse des Geistes ("Race of the Spirit"), which refers to psychological or "spiritual" character which is not hereditarily determined.[12]

Moeller argued that because peoples of the same biological race could have significant differences between each other, the English and the Germans being an example of this, "race of the blood" was not as powerful or important as a "race of the spirit." Conversely, it was also proven by the fact that a people could be made of up of a mixture of races, such as the Prussians (who were the result of an ancient Slavic-Germanic mix), yet still have a positive and unified form; although, of course, it should be noted that despite this commentary, Moeller would certainly have not approved of any European group mixing with non-European (i.e. non-white) races.[13]

The June Club and the Spengler Debate

In 1919, Moeller founded, along with Heinrich von Gleichen-Russwurm and Eduard Stadtler, the

“neoconservative” (an alternative term for “revolutionary conservative”) group known as the Juniklub (“June Club”), an organization of which Moeller would soon become the key ideological leader.[14] In early 1920, the June Club invited Oswald Spengler to discuss his book The Decline of the West with Moeller van den Bruck. Moeller and Spengler agreed on some basic issues, including the basic division between Kultur (“Culture”) and Zivilisation (“Civilization”), but had some significant disagreements as well.[15]

Moeller asserted that Spengler’s “morphological” theory of culture cycles had certain key inaccuracies. Firstly, he disagreed with Spengler’s rigidly deterministic and fatalistic view of history, in which the rise and decline of High Cultures were “destined” and could even be predicted, because for Moeller history was essentially unpredictable; it is “the story of the incalculable.”[16]

Secondly, the nations which Spengler claimed constituted the “West” had powerful differences between each other, especially in terms of being “young” and “old,” which affected whether they would rise or decline, as well as cultural differences. Moeller wrote that due to these significant differences there was clearly no “homogeneous Occident” and “for that reason alone there can be no homogeneous decline.”[17]

Not only that, but history resembled a “spiral” rather than a “circle,” and a nation in decline could actually reverse its decline if certain psychological changes and events could take place within it. In fact, Moeller felt that a nation like Germany could not even be classified as “Western” and even had more in common, in terms of spirit, with Russia than it did with France and England.[18]

The Third Empire

In 1922, Moeller, along with his two friends Heinrich von Gleichen and Max Hildebert Boehm, published a collection of their articles in the form of a book titled Die Neue Front (“The New Front”), which was intended to be a manifesto for young conservatives.[19] One year later, however, Moeller would publish his own manifesto, Das Dritte Reich (“The Third Empire,” translated into English as *Germany’s Third Empire*), which contained the most comprehensive exposition of his worldview.[20]

He began the book with a declaration of the ideal of the Third Empire which Germany had the potential to establish while simultaneously giving a warning that Germany must become “politically-minded.” In the first chapter he discussed the German Revolution of 1918 which established the Weimar Republic, declaring that this revolution introduced un-German political ideas which were imposed by the foreign powers of France and England, and that it must be overcome by a new, conservative and nationalist revolution.

Here Moeller also repeated his concept of “young peoples” and “old peoples,” emphasizing that the English and French nations were “old” but shrewd and politically experienced, while Germany was “young” and vigorous but had behaved in an inexperienced and impetuous manner. If Germany could rise above the defeated situation in which it was placed into, its leaders would need caution and political experience. Moeller warned that if German leaders would not handle the political situation “with the utmost care and skill” and with wisdom, “her[Germany’s] attempt will plunge us once more into impotence, into disintegration, into a

non-existence which will last this time not for decades but for centuries."[21]

The succeeding parts of *Germany's Third Empire* would examine the four typical ideological types – Revolutionary, Liberal, Reactionary, and Conservative – in Germany and their essential attitudes and ideas.

Revolutionaries, Socialism, and the Proletariat

The political type known as the "Revolutionary" or the "Radical," which was represented primarily by the Marxists, held the mistaken view that a nation and its society could be entirely transformed through a revolution, rapidly creating a new world. Moeller believed that this was a naive view of the life of nations, because the past customs, traditions, and values of a nation cannot ever simply be totally brushed aside. "We may be the victims of catastrophes which overtake us, of revolutions which we cannot prevent, but tradition always re-emerges."[22]

Moeller spent much time critiquing the materialist and rationalist ideological foundations of Marxism. He critiqued rationalism for failing to understand that "reason" had limits and was entirely separate from "understanding." "Reason should be one with perception. This reason ceased to perceive; she merely reckoned. Understanding is spiritual instinct; reason became mere intellectual calculation."[23] Materialism (which shared a link with rationalism) and rationalism "embraces everything except what is vital." Like rationalism, materialism could not understand either history or the nature of man:

> "The materialist conception of history, which gives economics greater weight than man, is a denial of history; it denies all spiritual values. . . . Man revolts against the merely animal in himself; he is filled with the determination not to live for bread alone – or, at a later stage, not alone for economics – he achieves consciousness of his human dignity. The materialist conception of history has never taken cognizance of these things. It has concentrated on half man's history: and the less creditable half." [24]

Thus Marxism, because it was founded upon such ideas, made the error of conceiving of man as a soulless animal guided merely by economic motives, while in reality higher spiritual forces and ideas guided his actions. Furthermore, Marx failed to understand that there could be no international proletariat because people, whether they were proletariats or not, were differentiated by belonging to different Völker (this is often translated as "nations," but may also be understood as "ethnicities").

Moeller believed that this failing was partly a product of Marx's rationalistic thought as well as his Jewish background, which made him "a stranger in Europe" who yet "dared to meddle in the affairs of European peoples." Moeller struck out: "Jew that he was, national feeling was incomprehensible to him; rationalist that he was, national feeling was for him out of date."[25]

However, socialism itself was not limited to Marxism and in fact, "international socialism does not exist . . . socialism begins where Marxism ends."[26] Moeller called for the recognition of the fact that "every people has its own socialism" and that a conservative "national socialism" of German origin existed which should be the foundation of the Third Empire.

This German socialism was essentially a form of socialistic corporatism, a "corporative conception of state and economics," which had its foundations in the ideas of thinkers such as

Friedrich List, Frieherr von Stein, and Constantin Frantz, as well as in the medieval guild system.[27] Other notable intellectuals who were contemporaries of Moeller, most prominently Oswald Spengler and Werner Sombart, advocated similar conceptions of "German socialism."[28]

Moeller also defied Marx's concept of the proletariat as well as his concept of class warfare, asserting that "the proletarian is a proletarian by his own desire." Thus the proletariat in the Marxian sense was not a product of his position in capitalist society, but merely of "the proletarian consciousness." Socialism is a "population problem," which is the "the most urgently socialist question conceivable" and which Marx was incapable of giving proper recognition to.[29]

The problem of the proletariat was essentially the problem of a nation having too much surplus population due to a lack of "living space," which meant that its people began to live in bad conditions. Because Germany was being prevented by foreign powers from solving its population problem, "the proletariat is learning that if oppressed classes suffer in body, oppressed nations suffer in soul." German proletarians and non-proletarians were both German and would have to unite in order to free themselves from oppression, for "only the nation as a whole can set itself free."[30]

Liberalism and Democracy

Liberalism was attacked by Moeller as a negative force which must be absolutely eliminated and which was the prime enemy of both the conservative Right and revolutionary Left. Liberalism, Moeller taught, is at its essence based upon individualism, meaning not simply the idea that the individual has value but a kind of egotism which refuses to recognize anything above the individual and which even puts total value upon self-interest. "The liberal professes to do all he does for the sake of the people; but he destroys the sense of community that should bind outstanding men to the people from which they spring."[31]

Thus, liberalism is a degenerating force which weakens nations and atomizes society; it is an ideology tolerated only by nations which no longer have a sense of unity or "state-instinct." Liberals consequently have no sense of responsibility towards their nation, being indifferent to both its past and its future and seeking only personal advantage. The disintegrating power of this ideology is obvious: "Their[liberals'] dream is the great International, in which the differences of peoples and languages, races and cultures will be obliterated."[32]

Moeller concluded that liberalism had created a form of state – the republic – in which the old aristocracy was replaced by a "dangerous, irresponsible, ruthless, intermediate stratum" of corrupt politicians who were guided solely by self-interest. Moeller even maintained that liberals did not even have proper idea of freedom: "Freedom means for him[the liberal] simply scope for his own egotism, and this he secures by means of the political devices which he has elaborated for the purpose: parliamentism and so-called democracy."[33]

In place of the liberal-republican concept of democracy, Moeller offered a new idea: "The question of democracy is not the question of the Republic" but is rather something that comes into being when the people "take a share in determining their own Fate."[34] Germans had originally been a democratic people in ancient times, which had nothing to do with theoretic

rights or even voting, but rather with the bond of peoplehood and with the monarch executing the people's will.

Thus, even a strong monarchy could be a democracy. However, Moeller believed that the old monarchy of the Second Reich had lost touch with the people and a new kind of monarchical state should come into being, a "democracy with a leader – not parliamentism."[35] This Leader would abolish the rule of the parties and institute a system in which leaders would "feel at one with the nation" and "identify the nation's fate with their own."[36]

Reactionaries and Conservatives

Reactionaries and Conservatives are often seen as interchangeable, but Moeller emphasized that there are important differences between the two groups. A reactionary is essentially someone who believes in a total reinstitution of a past form. That is, he seeks to reverse history and bring back into being all old practices, regardless of whether they are actually good or bad, because he believes that everything of the past was good. Moeller thus distinguished the reactionary from the conservative:

> "The reactionary's reading of history is as superficial as the conservative's is profound. The reactionary sees the world as he has known it; the conservative sees it as it has been and will always be. He distinguishes the transitory from the eternal. Exactly what has been, can never be again. But what the world has once brought forth she can bring forth again." [37]

What is meant here is that while a reactionary seeks to completely revive past forms, the conservative understands how the world actually functions. Societies evolve and therefore some values and traditions change, but at the same time certain values and traditions do not change or should not change. The conservative tries to preserve the values and customs which are good for the nation or are eternal in nature while simultaneously being accepting of new values and practices when they are helpful for the nation or when they replace older ones which were negative in effect. Therefore,

> "He [the conservative] has no ambition to see the world as a museum; he prefers it as a workshop, where he can create things which will serve as new foundations. His thought differs from the revolutionary's in that it does not trust things which were hastily begotten in the chaos of upheaval; things have a value for him only when they possess certain stability. Stable values spring from tradition." [38]

What, then, is a "Revolutionary Conservative" or "Conservative Revolutionary"? In many ways, Moeller's definition of conservative is basically equivalent to revolutionary conservative; one who values what is eternal or good while leaving behind what is no longer tenable or is bad. However, strictly speaking, for Moeller the revolutionary conservative is a conservative who merges conservative and revolutionary ideas for the benefit of the nation. Moeller wrote that "conservative-revolutionary thought" is the "only one which in a time of upheaval guarantees the continuity of history and preserves it alike from reaction and from chaos."[39] It is thus a necessary development which recognizes and reconciles "all the antitheses which are historically alive amongst us."[40]

Conservative Nationalism and the Third Empire

According to Moeller, conservatism and nationalism are linked, meaning that a conservative is now a nationalist. But how does he define “nationalism,” a term which often has contradictory definitions? Nationality (or alternatively, ethnicity) is not based simply on being born in a specific country and speaking its language, as has often been assumed in the past; a nation is in fact defined by “its own peculiar character from the manner in which the men of its blood value life.”[41] Thus Moeller wrote:

> “Consciousness of nationhood means consciousness of a nation’s living values. Not only those are Germans who speak German, or were born in Germany, or possess her citizen rights. Conservatism seeks to preserve a nation’s values, both by conserving traditional values, as far as these still possess the power of growth, and by assimilating all new values which increase a nation’s vitality. A nation is a community of values; and nationalism is a consciousness of values.” [42]

It is of interest to note here that liberal-egalitarian intellectuals oftentimes claim that nationalists believe that a nation is a totally unchanging entity in terms of character, while Moeller’s concept of conservatism and nationalism, as explained above, entirely defies these anti-nationalist prejudices. Similarly, Moeller’s associate, the influential volkisch (“Folkish”) thinker Max Hildebert Boehm, held the view that a Volk was not an unchanging organism but always in a state of flux.[43]

Finally, Moeller declared that “The crumbling state threatened to bury the nation in its ruins. But there has arisen a hope of salvation: a conservative-revolutionary movement of nationalism.”[44] It will establish a “Third Empire, a new and final Empire” which would unite the German people as a whole, would be founded upon conservative values and the love of country, and would resolve Germany’s economic and population problems. However, Moeller emphasized that the aim was not to fight only for Germany’s sake, but in fact “at the same time he[the German nationalist] is fighting for the cause of Europe, for every European influence that radiates from Germany as the centre of Europe.”[45] Thus, the fulfillment of German destiny would mean the salvation of Europe.

Influence and Death

Moeller’s grand vision for the future of German nationalism and conservatism had much influence among right-wing groups in Germany and was critical in the development of “revolutionary conservatism.” However, his most prominent influence was on Hitler’s National Socialist movement, even to the extent that Moeller is oftentimes said to be a precursor of National Socialism.

Although the term “Third Reich” did not originate with him, it was he who popularized it during the Weimar Republic and was the source from which the National Socialists adopted it.[46] Furthermore, Moeller’s concept of a Leader who identifies with the nation, the concept of a “national socialism,” his anti-liberalism, and his belief in the importance of nationality all bear an obvious relationship to Hitler’s National Socialism.

However, on the other hand, these ideas are certainly not unique to either Moeller or Hitler, and in fact predate both of them. There are also conspicuous differences between Moeller’s worldview and Hitler’s. Moeller did not share Hitler’s anti-Slavism or his particular racial views,

nor were his anti-Jewish attitudes as strong as Hitler's, even though he recognized Jews as a problem.

When Hitler visited the June Club in 1922 and had a discussion with Moeller, Moeller believed that while Hitler clearly was fighting for German interests, he did not have the right personal qualities or tendencies: "Hitler was wrecked by his proletarian primitivism. He did not understand how to give his national socialism any intellectual basis. He was passion incarnate, but entirely without measure or sense of proportion."[47]

According to Otto Strasser, another associate of Moeller, Hitler also did not understand Moeller's phrase "We were Teutons, we are Germans, we shall be Europeans," which meant that Germany should become "a member of the great European family"[48] Yet in spite of all this, Hitler still admired Moeller and a signed copy of his Das Dritte Reich was found in Hitler's bunker in 1945.[49]

By the year 1925, Moeller began to despair over the political situation in Germany and various negative developments. He did not have any confidence in the right-wing political forces which emerged, and it has also been suggested that he had feared that the National Socialists abused or distorted his ideas. As he began to withdraw from political activism, Moeller became lonelier and more depressed, and was finally struck by a nervous breakdown, after which he committed suicide on May 30, 1925.[50] But as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck passed from this world he left behind his imposing vision:

> "German nationalism fights for the possible Empire . . . . We are not thinking of the Europe of Today which is too contemptible to have any value. We are thinking of the Europe of Yesterday and whatever thereof may be salvaged for Tomorrow. We are thinking of the Germany of All Time, the Germany of a two-thousand-year past, the Germany of an eternal present which dwells in the spirit, but must be secured in reality and can only so be politically secured . . . . The ape and tiger in man are threatening. The shadow of Africa falls across Europe. It is our task to be guardians on the threshold of values." [51]

Notes

[1] Lucy Moeller van den Bruck as quoted in Fritz Stern, The Politics of Cultural Despair (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 184.

[2] Gerhard Krebs, "Moeller Van Den Bruck: Inventor of the 'Third Reich,'" The American Political Science Review, Vol. 35, No. 6 (Dec., 1941), pp. 1085–86.

[3] Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism; Its History And Dilemma In The* Twentieth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 154–55.

[4] Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Die Deutschen, 8 vols. (Minden, Westphalia: J. C. C. Bruns, 1910).

[5] Krebs, "Moeller Van Den Bruck," p. 1093.

[6] Kemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, p. 155–56.

[7] Ibid., p. 156.

[8] Moeller, Der preussische Stil (Munich, 1916), p. 202. Quoted in Klemperer, *Germany's New* Conservatism, p. 156.

[9] Moeller, Das Recht der Jungen Völker (Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1919).

[10] Moeller as quoted in Krebs, "Moeller Van Den Bruck," p. 1093.

[11] Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, pp. 158–59.

[12] On Moeller's racial views, see Stern, Politics of Cultural Despair, pp. 142–43, 187, and Alain de Benoist, "Arthur Moeller van den Bruck: Une 'Question a la Destinee Allemande,'" Nouvelle Ecole, Paris, 35, January 1980, http://www.alaindebenoist.com/pdf/arthur_moeller_van_den_bruck.pdf, pp. 13 & 35.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, p. 103.

[15] Benoist, "Arthur Moeller van den Bruck," p. 28.

[16] Moeller, Das Recht der Jungen Völker, pp. 11–39. Quoted in Zoltan Michael Szaz, "The Ideological Precursors of National Socialism," The Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Dec., 1963), p. 942.

[17] Moeller as quoted in Stern, Politics of Cultural Despair, p. 239.

[18] Benoist, "Arthur Moeller van den Bruck," pp. 13, 27–30.

[19] Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, p. 232 and Krebs, "Moeller Van Den Bruck," p. 1087.

[20] Moeller, *Germany's Third Empire* (Howard Fertig, New York, 1971). Note that a new edition of this work in English has recently been published by Arktos Media (London, 2012).

[21] Ibid., p. 24.

[22] Ibid., p. 223.

[23] Ibid., p. 212.

[24] Ibid., p. 55.

[25] Ibid., p. 43.

[26] Ibid., p. 76.

[27] Ibid., pp. 60, 74, 160.

[28] See Oswald Spengler, Selected Essays (Chicago: Gateway/Henry Regnery, 1967) and

Werner Sombart, Economic Life in the Modern Age (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Transaction Publishers, 2001).

[29] Moeller, *Germany's Third Empire*, pp. 160–62.

[30] Ibid., p. 161.

[31] Ibid., p. 90.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 110.

[34] Ibid., p. 132.

[35] Ibid., p. 133.

[36] Ibid., p. 227.

[37] Ibid., p. 181.

[38] Ibid., p. 223.

[39] Ibid., p. 192.

[40] Ibid., p. 254.

[41] Ibid., p. 245.

[42] Ibid., p. 245.

[43] Max Hildebert Boehm, Das eigenständige Volk (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1932).

[44] Moeller, *Germany's Third Empire*, p. 248.

[45] Ibid., p. 264.

[46] Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, pp. 153, 161–62.

[47] Moeller as quoted in Stern, Politics of Cultural Despair, p. 238.

[48] Otto Strasser, Hitler and I (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1940), pp. 39 & 217.

[49] Cyprian Blamires, World Fascism: A Historical Encyclopedia, Volume 1 (Santa Barbara, Cal.: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p. 431.

[50] Stern, Politics of Cultural Despair, p. 266 and Benoist, "Arthur Moeller van den Bruck," p. 49.

[51] Moeller, *Germany's Third Empire*, p. 264.

Tudor, Lucian. "Arthur Moeller van den Bruck: The Man & His Thought." Counter-Currents.com, 17 August 2012. <http://www.counter-currents.com/2012/08/arthur-moeller-van-den-bruck-the-man-and-his-thought/ >.